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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SARAJEVO 001287

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - THIS LIE HAS LEGS: MEDIA FRENZY OVER  
ALLEGED KARADZIC-HOLBROOKE DEAL

REF: SARAJEVO 1180

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CHARLES ENGLISH FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Radovan Karadzic's claim of an alleged secret deal with Richard Holbrooke, which he outlined in a four-page written statement addressed to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), has dominated the news in Bosnia for the past seven days. Despite our denials about the existence of a secret Holbrooke-Karadzic deal and coverage of Sean McCormick's press release, the local media has focused on reasons why Karadzic's claim is plausible and on actions the U.S. allegedly took to prevent Karadzic's arrest over the years. Karadzic's claim of a secret deal also sparked an exchange of barbs between the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH). We will look for opportunities to make strong statements aimed at refocusing the debate on Karadzic's crimes rather than on the myth of a deal, and we urge Washington to look for similar opportunities. END SUMMARY

Media Focuses on Alleged Holbrooke-Karadzic Deal  
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¶2. (U) Radovan Karadzic's claim that he and Richard Holbrooke had had a secret deal in which he had been promised his freedom in exchange for his departure from public life, outlined in a four-page statement he handed over to the Hague Tribunal last week, has dominated the local media for the past few days. Despite our denials that such an agreement existed, local media outlets have given some credibility to the story by speculating endlessly on the possible existence of the deal instead of focusing on Karadzic's crimes and/or on his legal proceedings.

¶3. (U) Predictably, the press in Republika Srpska is trumpeting Karadzic's allegations. A Serb daily in an August 5 article entitled "The U.S. is afraid of Karadzic" carried the statements of Karadzic's lawyer, who claimed that the existence of a Holbrooke-Karadzic deal improves Karadzic's standing before the Hague Tribunal because it explains why Karadzic was in hiding for such a long time. Some of the mainstream press in the Federation are also giving Karadzic's claims credibility. The daily Oslobodjenje reported that it is possible that a Holbrooke-Karadzic deal exists as the U.S. may have wanted to get rid of Karadzic at any cost to ensure that the Dayton Peace Agreement would be implemented. Sean McCormick's initial statement, which was perceived locally as a weak denial of the deal, and his subsequent, more strongly worded press release have received extensive press coverage.

Former EUR/SCE Director Chris Hoh's denial of a secret Holbrooke-Silajdzic deal has also been picked up by several daily papers, but has had to compete with a deluge of stories speculating on the existence of an agreement.

14. (U) Local media coverage has focused on steps that the U.S. had supposedly taken over the years to prevent Karadzic's arrest and his trial before the Hague Tribunal. Several media outlets reported that the U.S. may have tried to prevent the issuing of an indictment against Karadzic, but that former Chief Prosecutor Richard Gladstone had blocked the move. They also carried the statements of Florence Hartman, the former ICTY spokesperson, who, according to a Dutch media outlet, said that the Karadzic trial would shed light on secret deals made during the war. Hartman claimed that the Americans had been given Karadzic's exact locations over the years but had failed to act on the information, and that the CIA had told Serb police to stop following the Karadzic family. Meanwhile, As, a daily tabloid, carried the statements of a Croatian journalist who suggested that Ratko Mladic may have also made a secret deal with Holbrooke.

SDP and SBiH Trade Barbs  
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5 (C) Reactions to Karadzic's statements about his alleged deal with Holbrooke generated an exchange of barbs between the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Party for Bosnia and Herzegovina (SBiH). In an August 3 press statement, the SDP criticized Karadzic's attempts to shift focus away from his crimes to his supposed deal with Richard Holbrooke and

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the U.S. It also criticized the Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency and SBiH Party President Haris Silajdzic for allegedly making a comment that gave Karadzic the benefit of the doubt instead of denouncing his claim about a secret deal. This was the SDP's interpretation of Silajdzic's response to a question about the deal during an August 3 interview on Sarajevo Cantonal Television. Silajdzic said, "I do not know what to think, I do not have enough information."

Privately, SDP Party President Zlatko Lagumdzija said he believed that Silajdzic's statements were part of SBiH's strategy to tap into anti-American sentiment ahead of the October municipal elections.

16. (U) The SBiH responded by issuing a press release on August 5 essentially saying that Silajdzic's statements were an innocently meant "no comment" because he lacked information. It criticized the SDP for attempting to use the Karadzic arrest to gain points ahead of the upcoming October municipal elections. (Comment: In this case we believe Silajdzic can be taken at his word, particularly because he gave the quote to a local outlet and it was not picked up by the national media. End Comment)

Comment  
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17. (C) The Karadzic lie shows no signs of losing its legs. So far, apart from the sideshow provided by Lagumdzija and Silajdzic, politicians have not been active in this controversy. But this could change if the circus atmosphere on this issue continues, and could further distort the discussion. We will be urging our contacts to focus the debate where it belongs -- on the justice that is now being delivered to Karadzic and the need to continue improving the capacity of Bosnian institutions to deliver justice to other war criminals. We also urge Washington to look for opportunities to make strong statements aimed at refocusing the debate on Karadzic's crimes.

ENGLISH